

THE EARLY DAYS OF NEVA - DEERHOCK

By

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Wisconsin History.

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A land grant was obtained by the state of Wisconsin from the United States of America in December of 1863. The East half of the Southeast quarter of section 30 in Township number 32 North, of Range number 11 East and West half of the Southwest quarter of section 29 in Township number 32 North, of Range number 11 East was included in the list of lands selected by the State of Wisconsin following an act of Congress on July 2, 1862 entitled "Donating Public Lands to The Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for The Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanical Arts."

The State of Wisconsin in September 1884 granted Charles M. Upham the land that was plotted as the village of Neva, now Deerbrook. This village was plotted in January 1887. The Northern Land Company obtained the land North of the village of Reeves and carried on logging operations in 1895. That company sold the land to Charles M. Upham in the spring of 1896. Mr. Upham gave up this property to Mary Delaglise who sold it to the Dehters, Harlowe and Loos, Hainer and Snyder.

The village of Neva, though plotted later than the village of Reeves, became the industrial center. The reasons for this development were that the river was used for floating logs and the dam on the Sau Claire for power. This dam, known then as the Murphy dam and the Indian dam to the Northeast were used to float logs down the Sau Claire River to Wausau. The railroad station in the village also provided transportation of raw and finished products.

The village of Neva later changed to Deerbrook received its name from the Township of Neva. Neva Township was named in honor of Chief Neva, leader of a tribe of Chippewa Indians, who visited at what is now known as Neva Corners on their way north to Post Lake in an early day.

The village of Neva had its name changed to Deerbrook by Edward Denson a timber cruiser and prospector, who, while camping near the Eau Claire river watched the deer "drink his fill" each morning just as the sun peeped over the hills proclaiming a new day. Thus he called it "Deerbrook," by which it has since been known.

BUILDINGS OF VILLAGE OF NEVA - DEERBROOK

The village of Deerbrook today is a far cry from what it was 60 years ago. Driving down the only street in the village the observer can count 20 houses, 1 saw mill, a mechanic garage and a building that houses both the post office and a small store that is often closed. It is hard to believe that this sleepy little community was once a thriving industrial center.

Where the remains of the dam are seen today, there was a sawmill which was constructed by Harlowe and Loos. They migrated from Oshkosh and brought their followers with them. After the pine in the surrounding area had been cut down the mill was sold. It stood idle for a year before John Reindle, Anton Ficks, and Louis Kovctny operated it and shortly after its operation it was destroyed by fire.

At about this same time 1897 the first boarding house and tavern (in those days they were known as saloons) stood on the corner across from the post office. It was owned by Thomas Hefner and later John Krel. The building was moved to the center of the block where the Jacobus store stood. Gabriel Kaplanok obtained the building and used it as a boarding house. This building was later remodeled into a store by Mr. Kaplanok's son-in-law Henry Jacobus. The store operated until it burned in March 1940.

The first store in Deertbrook was built and owned by Mr. Dexter. Later it became a company store owned by Mr. Reindle, Sicha, and Novotny. In 1905 Rudolph Wiegert purchased the store and after his retirement his son Edwin continued in business. After a succession of owners the store burned down on September 14, 1955.

Miss Martha Lucas a retired school teacher from the Deertbrook area recalled for me that, "As a child I remember waiting in the Wiegert store for an hour or more to be waited on, for in the days when Deertbrook was at its height as a milling center, people came from farms eight and ten miles distance with cream and eggs to trade for groceries, dry goods, footwear and any other items which were found in the general store."

Another important business of the time was the Gristmill erected in about 1900 by a company of stockholders. After a two year period the company sold the mill to Ernest and Harmon Hirt. Farmers came from miles away to have their wheat and rye ground into flour. After the threshing was done in the fall

the mill was operated day and night to keep up with the demand. Farmers often had to remain in town over night finding lodging at the hotel.

The Hirt brothers also operated a sawmill and a planing mill in Deerbrook. They had a crew of about thirty men employed sawing logs into lumber, piling it in the lumber yard and then after it was seasoned they poled it into box cars for shipment. This saw mill was destroyed by fire on March 1, 1924 and although another mill was built in its place it never did the business that the original one had done.

Other business involved in the early years of Deerbrook include the Butcher shop was managed by Marx Snyder who had the Meat shop downstairs and who resided upstairs. The building was later moved to the north of the present store by Martin Lajva. Mr. Lajva remodeled the building into a blacksmith shop. He later sold it to Mr. Edward Mossack who continued blacksmithing until 1942. Business for the blacksmith boomed when everything else was at its height in Deerbrook. Horses from the millyard had to be shod, wagons and other machines had to be repaired. Farmers from near and far came to have work done. After Mossack retired in 1942. The building stood idle until 1949 when it was dismantled.

The post office of Deerbrook was moved a number of times over the years it was first in the railroad station, then in the company store, and later in the home of Mrs. R J. Small then the Postmistress. In later years it was housed in the store owned by Siegert, the depot again, and it is presently under the same roof as the small Deerbrook store.

The one item that probably effected the settlement of Deerbrook the most was the railroad that ran through the village. The Milwaukee, Lakeshore, and Western railroad operated the first train through Deerbrook to settlements in the north. A depot was built and Mr. Connors was the first depot agent. In 1893, the Chicago Northwestern Railroad Company purchased all interests of the above company and continues to operate the railroad today.

The hotel built by the Hirt brothers in 1906 was used to accommodate laborers from other towns. After the sawmill business became slack, the building was arranged into apartments and occupied by tenants. When the Jacobus store burned in March 1940. The hotel was destroyed by neighboring flames.

SCHOOL

The first school in the Deerbrook-Neva area was a small log building erected on the farm of John Novak, (my great Grandfather). This school was used by a handful of the early families. The first school that children of Deerbrook attended was at Mattek's corners, (now known as Neva). Children from Deerbrook and the surrounding farms within a radius of three miles attended this school. The school was a simple frame structure made of lumber some what larger than that on the Novak farm. The school on the Novak farm had burnt down. At the Mattek's corners children sang, read, recited poetry, spelled and practiced writing.

The seating arrangement in the school room was arranged around the stove that was in the middle of the room. The girls sat on the left side of the furnace facing the teacher and the boys sat on the right side of the furnace. I was told that the children who sat next to the furnace were always hot and those farthest away from it

were always cold. This school was in use until 1904 when the Deerbrook Graded school was built. This three roomed school was in use up to 1960.

POLITICS

One would think that politics would be very sparsely attended in pioneer communities but the Neva and Deerbrook communities were different. In 1880 the first town election was held as Antigo, Shawano county, but in 1883 Neva was admitted as a town.

Mr. Deleglise founder of Antigo operated for both and sought to build a community according to his own ideals so he wanted certain men who would back his plans. The Neva election would be run by the Deerbrook mill hands since they numbered about forty and none were tax payers. To make sure the settlers were treated fairly Mr. Deleglise sent Attorney Schime (who died of consumption) and Vavrunek to carry things properly.

The meeting was to be held at John Jacobus's home for the Republican caucus. The mill hands, however, had ideas of their own as to who would be sent as delegates so they wouldn't admit the settlers which raised the temper of Mr. Smetana. He called the lawyers and the settlers to his place and after a discussion proved his point that a taxpayer was better entitled to vote than a migrant and so the caucus was held at two places. When all was over six delegates instead of three appeared at the county clerk's office but the Deleglise-Smetana party won.

Just south of present day Deerbrook is the intersection of county Trunk B and what is now Railroad drive. To look at it now the observer would see two houses on opposite corners and that's all. Years ago however the village of Reeve stood in this spot. Founded before Deerbrook in 1883 the village of Reeve thrived as a trade center. In the late 1880's and early 1890's Reeve contained a barber shop, a blacksmiths shop, a general store, a shop where wagons and sleds were made.

RECREATION

Life was not "all work and no play" in the early days in Deerbrook. Indian pow-wows were held at the indian settlement at Indian Dam, four miles northeast of the village. People came from the neighboring communities to see these ceremonials which were held on Saturday nights during the summer.

Dancing was also a form of recreation for the settlers. Dances were held on the thresh floor of a farmer's barn with someone from the community furnishing fiddle music. Later the dances were held at the dance halls erected by the Mattak's and Smetana's. Dances were also held at an open pavilion built by Wencel Smetana in his woods on Saturday afternoons.

The Hirt brothers sponsored picnics on their property for their employees and friends. Sometimes these were held on the river banks and sometimes in newly erected buildings. The Lutheran church also held picnics for its members which included dinner and games.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Most of the people who lived in Deerbrook (then the village of Neva) attended the St. Matthews Lutheran Church which prior to 1923 was located on county Trunk A. In 1920 the congregation purchased a parsonage, through the constant efforts and energies of the congregation, this corner still remains an attractive spot.

A few of the families attended the St. Wencesel's Catholic Church which was constructed in 1897 north of Mattek's coners. This congregation was served by a Polish priest from Antigo. Since most of them were Bohemian, they engaged a priest from St. Mary's Church to say Mass every other Sunday. Now the parish maintains a priest who resides in the parish hall. In the mid 50's a new and unique church was built because the old one proved inadequate. The new church is a stone circular building with a large dome.

To those families who had no place of worship came Miss Helen Jones of Kampster in the summer of 1919 for the purpose of starting a Bible school. The doors of the Joseph Fischer home were opened wide for the first meeting with Reverend Dixon of Antigo Congregational church as pastor. After that, services were held by Miss Jones in members homes. Later it was decided to hold them on Friday evenings at the Norman Rice home.

PEOPLE

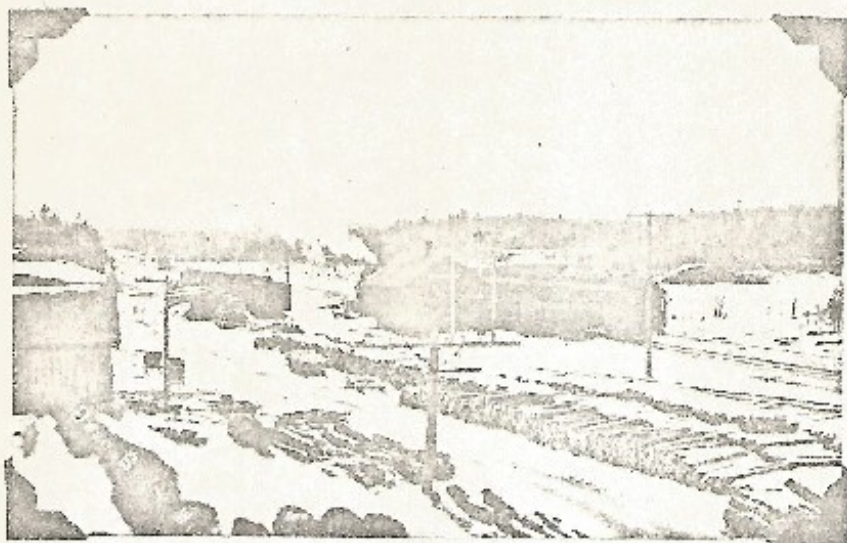
Most of the people who came to Deerbrook in the early days were transients. They stayed while work was plentiful and then moved on.

A few German and Bohemian families who had business establishments became the permanent settlers. These people contributed not only to the development and prosperity of the Deerbrook that once was, but through their intelligence and efforts maintained a higher standard of living for others. They promoted the religious, educational recreational and social aspects which without the whole community would have suffered.

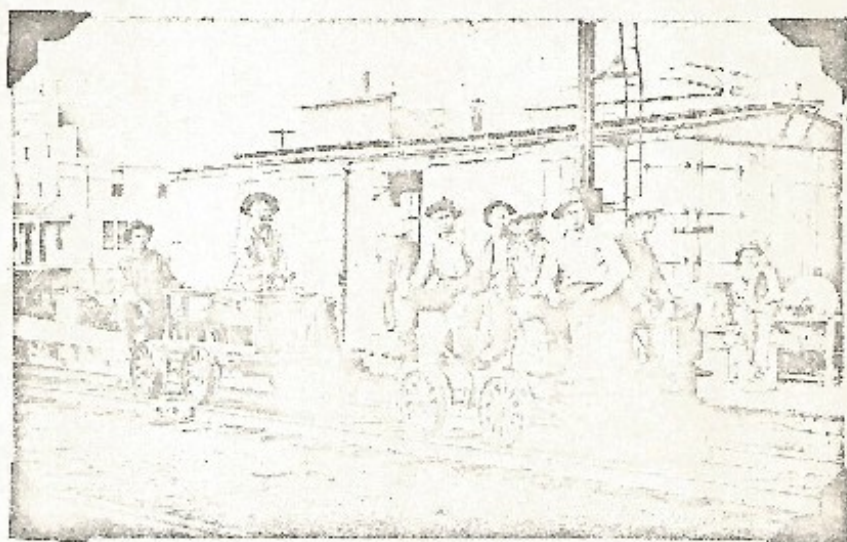
The Bohemian settlers that came to the Deerbrook area were mostly immigrants though some had lived for awhile in Manitowoc. These people came with a trade or vocation which they learned in their homeland, tailors, tin smiths, blacksmiths, shoemakers and seamstresses were among them.

They were a merry people, and the hard work and privations which they suffered did not faze them for they were determined to conquer these difficulties and make a better living for their families.

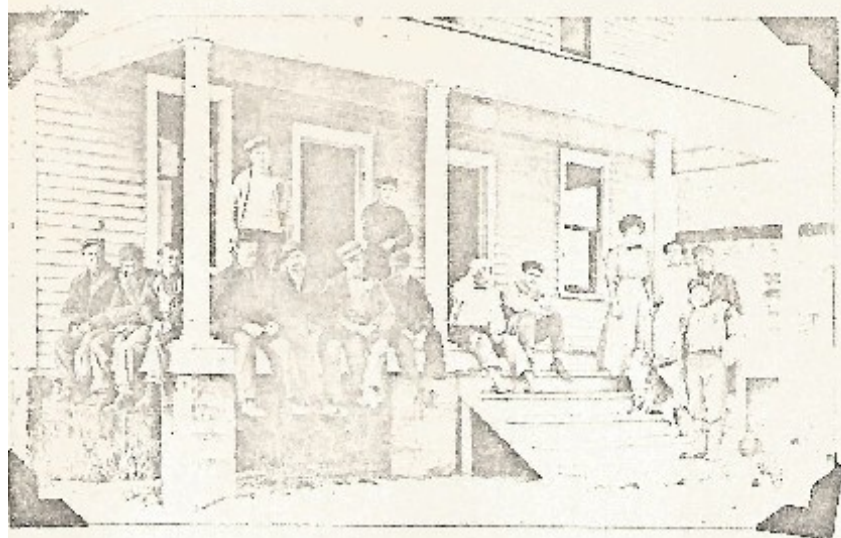
They lived in their communities as one big family, helping each other as the need presented itself, either in building their cabins and barns or in sickness or in planting and harvesting their crops.



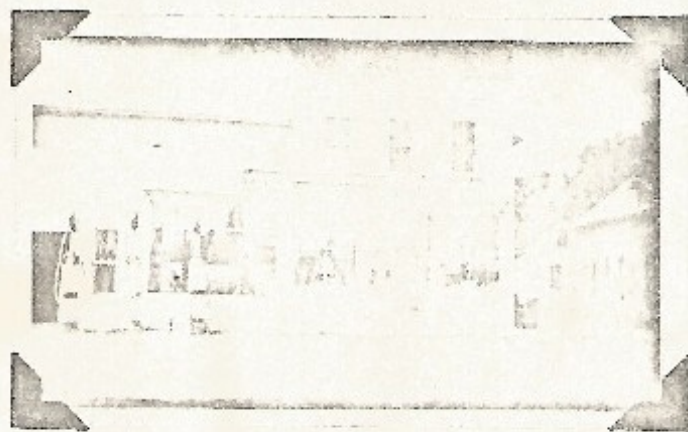
The Deerbrook saw-mill and depot 1896



The Deerbrook depot early 1900's



The boarding house in Lee Street 1910



The general store 1930's